CRUEL TO ONESELF

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Today's Learning:
Kinim 3:6 / Kelim 1:1
O.C. 32:18-20
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Avodah Zarah 72
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Yoma 32

A significant part of this parashah is devoted to the Tochachah / Rebuke, which foretells the troubles and punishments that will (and have) come upon the Jewish People when they sin. The Tochachah warns repeatedly that we will continue to suffer as long as we attribute our suffering to "keri" / "chance" rather than to our sins.

Rambam (Hil. Ta'anit ch. 1) writes that the Torah commands us to react to suffering with prayer and repentance. Rambam adds that one who does not do this, saying that his suffering is simply the way of the world, is "achzari" / "cruel."

What does Rambam mean by this expression? asks R' Shimson David Pinkus z"l (rabbi of Ofakim, Israel). At first glance, Rambam is saying that a person who fails to repent is "cruel" to himself, for he brings additional punishments upon himself. But that cannot be correct, says R' Pinkus, for every person who sins makes himself liable for punishment. Why would Rambam single out a person's failure to repent from all other sins?

Rather, explains R' Pinkus, Rambam's meaning is as follows: One who believes that suffering occurs by chance is accusing G-d of cruelty. He is suggesting that G-d created us, but then abandoned us. The teachers of Mussar / character development and ethics teach that one generally sees in others the faults that he himself has. Thus, one who would wrongly attribute cruelty to G- d must himself be cruel. (Tiferet Torah)

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"If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments . . ." (26:3)

Rashi writes that "If you will follow My decrees" refers to toiling in Torah study. If so, writes R' Akiva Yosef Schlesinger z"l (Hungary and Yerushalayim; died 1922), we can understand why this verse follows immediately after the verse, "My Sabbaths you shall observe." Specifically, the Midrash Tanna D'vei Eliyahu states that the primary time for Torah study is on Shabbat, when one is free from working. (Torat Yechiel)

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"Then they will confess their sin and the sin of their forefathers, for the treachery with which they betrayed Me . . . I, too, will behave toward them with casualness and I will bring them into the land of their enemies." (26:40-41)

Why, if Bnei Yisrael confess their sins, will Hashem behave toward them with casualness and bring them to the land of their enemies? R' Moshe Freidiger z"l (communal leader in Pest, Hungary) explains:

Teshuvah means confessing one's sins and not making excuses. Here, Bnei Yisrael will confess, but they will justify their actions by saying that their forefathers acted the same way. Such a "teshuvah" will be rejected. (Quoted in Otzrot Tzaddikei U'geonei Ha'dorot)

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"I will make the land desolate . . . And you--I will scatter among the nations . . . During all the days of her desolation, the land will rest; those sabbaticals that it did not observe while you were on the land, it will observe now." (26:32-35)

R' Avraham Yitzchak Kook z"l wrote: Upon being exiled, the Jewish people were freed of any national concerns; they rather turned their eyes and hearts heavenward. Jews were no longer preoccupied with the same concerns that draw the attention of the other nations, and at the same

time, Jews ceased to chase after the idols [literal and figurative] of the nations. The spirit of Hashem prompted the Jew to recognize the value of every soul, and particularly, the spiritual worth of the Jewish nation. The Torah was appreciated more than fine gold and silver, just as in the nation's youth. Because of their holy faith, the Jews in exile went to martyrdom with love and happiness.

The Jew in exile always turned toward his land [Israel], but not as one who yearns for his home because it satisfies his hunger and his other physical needs. The Jew looked toward his land with a gaze filled with holiness; he looked toward its inner nature as the land that complements his yearning for G-d.

The time of the redemption is hidden. Who is privy to G-d's secret, knowing when the land and the nation will have been completely purified, that beloved time when the land and the nation will be reunited? Our sages have said that there is no greater sign of the onset of the redemption than the fulfillment of the verses from the Prophets: "And you, mountains of Israel, give forth your branches, present your fruits to My nation, Yisrael, for they are near to arrive." "And the cities will be settled and ruins will be rebuilt, and I will increase men and animals on the land and they will multiply . . ." (Introduction to Shabbat Ha'aretz)

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Pirkei Avot

"There are four characteristics among those who sit before Torah scholars: (1) a sponge; (2) a funnel; (3) a strainer (`mishameret'); and (4) a sieve." (Chapter 5)

In 1946, R' Yoel Teitelbaum z"l (the Satmar Rav) was invited to speak at Yeshivat Bet Avraham - Slonim in Yerushalayim. He introduced his lecture with the following explanation of the above Mishnah: The Gemara mentions that certain pious individuals used to spend nine hours a day either preparing for prayer or actually praying. The Gemara asks, "How then is their Torah accomplished?" The Gemara answers, "Because they are pious, their Torah is `mishtameret'."

The Gemara's answer is usually understood to mean that their Torah knowledge is "protected" by the merit of their prayer. However, this answer is difficult to understand, said R' Teitelbaum. If "mishtameret" means being "protected," it can only refer to the Torah which these pious individuals have already learned. How, however, will they learn more if they are so occupied with prayer?

Rather, the Gemara means "mishtameret" in the sense of the "mishameret" / "strainer" of our Mishnah. The Mishnah describes a mishameret as something that lets the wine pass through but keeps out the dregs. For the ordinary person, accomplishment in Torah requires extraordinary effort; for the pious, who spend the bulk of their time in prayer, Torah is easily "strained." True insights are acquired with less effort, while the "dregs" / false leads and misunderstandings fall by the side. (Mimayanot Hanetzach, p.274)

R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (Poland; died 1869) understands our Mishnah to be speaking not of Torah

scholars but of the supporters of the Torah. This is based upon the verse (Devarim 33:18), "Rejoice, Zevulun, in your excursions, and Yissachar, in your tents"--a reference to the fact that Yissachar and Zevulun shared the profits of Zevulun's business and the rewards of Yissachar's Torah study. Note that Zevulun is mentioned before Yissachar in the verse.

There are four types of Torah supporters, the Mishnah says: a sponge, a funnel, a strainer, and a sieve. The first is someone who "absorbs" all requests for charity, whether the recipient is deserving or not. The second steals in order to give charity; the money just passes through his hands, as through a funnel. The third--the "strainer"--accepts requests only from those who are not worthy, just as a strainer passes the wine, and retains the dregs. Finally, the fourth is like a type of sieve which holds the finest flour and allows the bran to pass through--he accepts requests only from the worthy. (Magen Avot)

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R' Aharon Lapapa z"l

R' Aharon Lapapa was born in Magnesia, near the western coast of Turkey, in approximately 1590. He studied in Salonika, Greece, where his teacher was R' Avraham Motal, and in Constantinople, under R' Yosef Tirani ("Maharit").

R' Lapapa began his rabbinic career in the town of his birthplace in 1632, serving the poor community as rabbi without pay. At the same time, he headed a yeshiva where many prominent rabbis were trained. In the spring of 1665, he accepted the post of dayan (judge) left vacant by the passing of R' Yosef Escapa, rabbi of Izmir (Smyrna). In that position, R' Aharon ruled on civil cases, while another rabbi, R' Chaim Benveniste (author of Knesset Hagedolah), ruled on the community's ritual questions.

R' Aharon's tenure in Smyrna was short-lived. He was an opponent of the (now known to be) false messiah, Shabtai Zvi, who had a strong following in Izmir. On 6 Tevet 5426 / 1665, the latter proclaimed R' Benveniste supreme rabbi of the community, effectively dismissing R' Aharon from his post. Thereafter, R' Aharon was afraid even to walk the streets, and not until the false messiah converted to Islam was R' Aharon safe again.

R' Aharon was famed as a posek, and some of his responsa are published in Bnei Aharon. Others of his works were never published. The 18th century bibliographer, R' Chaim Yosef David Azulai ("Chida") mentions a view that part of the Shittah Mekubetzet attributed to R' Bezalel Ashkenazi may have been written by R' Aharon.

R' Aharon died on 26 Iyar 5427 / 1667.

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